

Cedarville Methodist Church
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Main Street
Cedarville
Cumberland County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1162

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CEDARVILLE METHODIST CHURCH

HABS No. NJ-1162

Location: Main Street, Cedarville, Cumberland County, New Jersey

Significance: This two-story, gable-front frame church form with Classical-Italianate vernacular styling is typical to small, rural South Jersey towns.

Description: This two-story, gable-front, rectangular frame church sits on a masonry foundation; it is three bays wide and four bays deep. Typical of local vernacular tradition, it has a Classical form with large modillioned pediment, deep boxed cornice, with corner and front-facade pilasters. An Italianate influence is apparent in paired brackets on the cornice; the primary windows are tall, narrow, triple-hung wood sash with rounded tops. The lintels and sills appear to be painted dark, to contrast the white structure. The ground-floor fenestration is four-over-four-light double-hung sash with decorative hoods. A central entrance has been modified: paired glazed doors and glazed transom window are set inside a simple but pronounced door surround.

History: The Methodists first organized in Salem County in the late eighteenth century, though by the late nineteenth century their numbers proliferated beyond all other religious groups. In 1772 Benjamin Abbott of Pittsgrove Township, a religious skeptic and acknowledged drinker, had a dream that converted him into a fire-and-brimstone evangelist who succeeded in uniting Methodists in Salem and inspiring others as far away as the Eastern Shore of Maryland. After his conversion, Abbott worked with John Murphy, a neighbor, to put together a Methodist congregation in Pittsgrove Township. Murphy opened his home to Methodist itinerants and soon the first Methodist Society in Salem County commenced worshipping. A church was built on Murphy's land shortly thereafter.

In 1774, Abbott moved to Mannington Township and helped Daniel Ruff, an itinerant preacher, to introduce Methodism to Salem. Abbott's congregation held its meetings in a barn-like building until 1784 when several Quakers financed the construction of a church on Walnut Street in Salem. By 1826 the number of Methodists in Salem had grown so rapidly that the church on Walnut Street could no longer accommodate them. As a result, the congregation built and dedicated a new church in 1838. Twenty years later, part of the congregation split and built yet another new church on Broadway. The Broadway United Methodist Church is extant today.

Methodism soon spread beyond Salem into many parts of Cumberland County. As early as 1800, a Methodist Society was present in Newport. The society was organized by a Capt. Webb and meetings were held in the sailloft of Jonathan Sockwell's barn. In 1814 the barn was remodeled into a church, which burned down seven years later. An intermediate structure was utilized until 1852 when the present structure was built on property bought from Sheppard Robbins.

In 1804 Methodists in Bridgeton were organized under the leadership of William Brooks; three years later Jeremiah Buck donated a lot on Commerce Street for the first Methodist church. Two years after the formation of the Methodist Society in Bridgeton, one was formed in Leesburg. After meeting in private homes for five years, the society was incorporated and a new church built. Branches were formed off the Leesburg church in 1856 when the membership became too large. As a result, the members from Dorchester formed their own society and built a new church in 1863.

The Mauricetown and Haleyville Methodist Episcopal societies formed in the early nineteenth century and were served by the same pastors until 1881. In 1841 the first Methodist church was built in Mauricetown. Its congregation used the church until 1880 when it was moved to a new site, turned into the town hall, and replaced by a new building.

Millville's first Methodist Society was organized in 1807 when the Cumberland circuit was set off from the Salem circuit. In 1824 Trinity Methodist Church, located on Second and Smith streets, commenced holding services. Forty-two years later, a portion of the congregation constructed a new building on Second and Pine streets; this is the First Methodist Church. Today the Methodists of Millville are served by seven different churches.

Methodists organized in Cedarville before 1820 held meetings in the local wheelwright shop. The present church was built in 1863. Situated on both sides of Cedar Creek, a tributary of the Delaware River, Cedarville (first called Cedar Creek), is four miles from Fairton and eight miles from Bridgeton. The first white explorer believed to have seen the creek was Samuel Argall, captain of the DISCOVERY, which sailed up the Delaware Bay in 1610. In the late seventeenth century, Cedarville was home to such great men as Drs. Jonathan Elmer and Ephraim Bateman, both physicians and congressmen. Cedar Creek was renamed Cedarville in 1806 with the establishment of a post office. Throughout the nineteenth century the town grew with the development of local industries founded on the locale's natural resources: bog iron, sand, water power, and fertile land. In the early twentieth century, Cedarville was home to three canneries: W. L. Stevens and Brothers, J. E. Diamant Company, and Fruit Preserving Company, as well as the Crystal Sand Company. Nineteenth-century prosperity allowed residents to erect fine vernacular and Victorian homes here.

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